

Statement of Congressman Wexler
Europe Subcommittee on Northern Ireland
May 25, 2005

I want to thank Chairman Gallegly for holding this important hearing on Northern Ireland, and the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement and possibilities for the future.

I am pleased U.S. envoy Mitchell Reiss could join us today, having just returned from talks in London, Belfast and Dublin. I look forward to hearing his analysis of recent parliamentary elections in the U.K and their impact on the peace process.

Since the Good Friday agreement was signed in 1998, Northern Ireland has experienced both ups and downs. Significant progress has been made - such as the establishment of the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive Committee in which the unionists and nationalists share power, and the transfer of governing authority from London to Belfast. Unfortunately, such progress has not been sustained. The devolved government has been suspended since 2002, negotiations remain stalemated and the IRA's commitment to disarmament and non-violence appears shaky at best.

The results of recent UK Parliamentary elections appear to have solidified the Catholic-Protestant divide, with the most staunch nationalists and unionists winning on both sides. It is now up to the leaders of the DUP and Sinn Fein to use their mandate either to break the current political impasse, or to continue the political polarization that has plagued this region for more than 35 years.

While I am sympathetic to the hardships and discrimination facing the Catholic community, the IRA must further decommission and abide by the rule of law. It must disarm and disassociate itself from other criminal activity such as the tragic murder of Robert McCartney earlier this year. While I was pleased to see Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams' April statement calling on the IRA to end its armed struggle and fully embrace the political process, his words must be followed up by action on the ground.

Unionists must also take responsibility for their part in furthering the peace process and ending violence. They must fully commit themselves to stable power-sharing arrangements, human rights and fair employment. In addition, they must urge loyalist paramilitaries to disband and curb sectarian violence. And although important police reforms have been initiated over the last few years, all sides must work together to complete implementation of those reforms and ensure that new police services enjoy the support of the community as a whole.

At this juncture, it is clear that the British, Irish and U.S. governments must keep pushing for renewed power-sharing and paramilitary decommissioning in Northern Ireland. In the December 2004 proposals, the British and Irish government laid out a constructive plan for rebuilding governing institutions, restarting the devolved government and transferring

justice and policing authorities to Northern Ireland. While I am hopeful this plan succeeds, the British government must also exhaust every measure to bring about a fair and just resolution to outstanding cases, including the murder of Patrick Finucane.

It is my sincere hope that all parties renew their commitment to the Good Friday Agreement and implement provisions that will break down the historic barriers that have separated Catholics and Protestants for far too long. The status quo cannot be sustained, and it is time for compromise on both sides that will build an atmosphere conducive to peace.